

because no action was named or uncovered, nothing happened. Everyone assumed something had happened—what else could it have been besides an unnatural amour? Moving in and out of the Codrington divorce is the specter of a lesbian affair. An elderly man, accused by the defense of refusing his wife's sexual overtures, is guilty of stirring a bedroom fire with a poker—what better metaphor for male interference in female warmth?

The Sorcerer and His Apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity

Alex Owen

In late 1909, two Englishmen, scions of the comfortable middle classes, undertook a journey to Algiers. Aleister Crowley, later to be dubbed "the wickedest man in the world," was in his early thirties; his companion, Victor Neuburg, had only recently graduated from Cambridge. The stated purpose of the trip was pleasure. Crowley, widely traveled and an experienced mountaineer and big-game hunter, loved North Africa and had personal reasons for wanting to be out of England. Neuburg probably had little say in the matter. Junior in years, dreamy and mystical by nature, and in awe of a man whom he both loved and admired, Neuburg was inclined to acquiesce without demur in Crowley's various projects. There was, however, another highly significant factor in Neuburg's quiescence. He was Crowley's chela, a novice initiate of the magical Order of the Silver Star which Crowley had founded two years earlier. As such, Neuburg had taken a vow of obedience to Crowley as his Master and affectionately dubbed "holy guru" and had already learned that in much that related to his life Crowley's word was now law. It was at Crowley's instigation that the two men began to make their way, first by tram and then by foot, into the North African desert to the southwest of Algiers; and it was Crowley's decision to perform there a series of magical ceremonies which prefigured his elaboration of

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the techniques of sex magic. In this case, the ceremonies combined the performance of advanced ritual magic with homosexual acts. It is this episode—sublime and terrifying as an experience, profound in its effects, and critical to the argument I seek to make for magical practice as a self-conscious exploration of subjectivity—which constitutes the focus of this essay.

Magic, or more specifically, ritual or ceremonial magic, has a long and august history in Western Europe. Associated strongly with the medieval and early modern periods, ritual magic has traditionally been associated with learned elites. Loosely understood to be the theory and practice of accessing and communicating with powerful but unseen natural or universal forces, ritual magic was invariably an occult or secret undertaking. Its procedures were confided in grimoires, textbooks of ritual magic, and these became the jealously guarded jewels of the magical tradition. This tradition, often assumed to be an archaic vestige with little purchase or relevance for the modern period, survived intact into the nineteenth century when it began to emerge as a more accessible subject of study with the publication of classical grimoires in English translation. Francis Barrett's *The Magus* (London, 1801) was a landmark text, and by the mid-century several formal groups had been established with the express purpose of studying the magical arts. Far from disappearing in the modern period, ritual magic became a central but hidden component of the nineteenth-century occult revival.¹

A general fascination with the occult was a marked, if until relatively recently little understood, aspect of Victorian society and culture.²

¹ To date, there has been no scholarly historical treatment of modern magic, its place within nineteenth-century occultism, or its relationship to broader social and cultural themes. This is undoubtedly due in part to the arcane nature of much magical material, the traditional secrecy surrounding magical orders, and the difficulties involved in accessing reliable sources. The situation, however, is slowly changing. The publication of some revered and secret Victorian material (see, e.g., Israel Regardie, *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic* [Phoenix, 1984]), and the acquisition of private collections by research institutes and libraries is making the study of modern magic more manageable. Following the second occult revival of the 1960s, a number of general books have appeared on magic. These are usually the work of informed occultists. See, e.g., Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism* (1970; reprint, Bridport, 1989).

² Long neglected as an area of scholarly study, occultism received relatively scant treatment at the hands of historians. Recent studies have begun to rectify the situation, and there is growing interest in British, European (including Russian), and American movements. British studies include Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York, 1983); Diana Burfield, "Theosophy and Feminism: Some Explorations in Nineteenth Century Biography," in *Women's Religious Experience*, ed. Pat Holden (London, 1983); Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1985); Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–*

The mid- to late decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the appearance of spiritualism and Theosophy, which together accounted for many thousands of adherents, and the emergence of various small groups dedicated to different forms of Western and Eastern arcane teachings. The occult exerted a broad appeal, perhaps best exemplified by the huge success of "occult" fiction like Rider Haggard's *She* (London, 1887) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Westminster, 1897), that operated in tandem with the Victorian craze for orientalism and "the mysterious East." Serious students of the occult, however, were drawn less by the glamour of exoticism than the promise of privileged access to secret knowledge and a hidden realm of alternative spiritual wisdom. In suggesting the possibility of spiritual revelation, the occult played on a Victorian triumphalist notion of progress while allaying fears that advances in knowledge and understanding might result in the desecration of a mysterious and wonderful universe. Occultism's founding impulse, the elaboration of human destiny as a quest for the key which would unlock the secrets of creation, promised revelation as a prelude to spiritual growth and enlightenment.

Ritual magic was certainly suggestive of this promise. It emerged most strongly in the nineteenth century in its Rosicrucian form, that is, as a particular configuration of seventeenth-century occult learning.³ The Rosicrucian tradition, with its roots in Jewish mysticism, Hebrew-Christian sources of ancient wisdom, and the powerful "Egyptian" writings of Hermes Trismegistus, was marked by the elaborate interplay of the philosophical or spiritual with the practical and magical.⁴ This combina-

1910 (London, 1986); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London, 1989; Philadelphia, 1990); and Joy Dixon, "Gender, Politics, and Culture in the New Age: Theosophy in England, 1880–1935" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, January 1993).

³ The history of the Rosicrucian tradition is a vexed one, but we know that a secret Rosicrucian Masonic Order, the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, was founded in England in 1865. Its membership was involved in the formation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, to which this essay subsequently refers. The term "Rosicrucian" derives from the name "Rosencreutz" or "Rose Cross." "Christian Rosencreutz" first makes his appearance in the so-called "Rosicrucian manifestos," two short pamphlets which are usually abbreviated as the *Fama* and the *Confessio*, which were published at Cassel in 1614 and 1615. A third pamphlet, translated from the German as *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, was published in 1616. Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London, 1972), suggests that the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian movement was in part an allegory for a renewed "general reformation" based on a strengthened Protestant alliance with Frederick V, elector palatine of the Rhine, at its center. I am indebted to her account, and to her explication of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1964). For an account of Rosicrucianism written by an Hermetic scholar and early member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, see Arthur E. Waite, *Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London, 1924).

⁴ The vast body of literature ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, thought by the Renaissance magi to be an ancient Egyptian priest, was probably the work of various unknown

tion of the philosophical and magical found its way directly into the foremost Victorian magical Order, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and constituted one of its main attractions. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, established in the late 1880s, represented itself, in some respects correctly, as a direct link with the arcane traditions of the past. Although its founding documents were probably spurious, and its major rituals undoubtedly the work of Victorian scholars and magicians, its teachings were based on an imaginative reworking of Hermetic writings further informed by nineteenth-century scholarship in Egyptology and anthropology. The Order's name spoke to the realization of a Rosicrucian rebirth, the regeneration of the old, corrupt world, and dawning of a new spiritually enlightened age—timely notions for many at the fin de siècle.

The Golden Dawn is now chiefly remembered as a formative influence on the literary imagination of the poet and playwright W. B. Yeats, but its largely middle-class adherents numbered in the hundreds and included gifted men and women from the world of arts and letters. Unlike Freemasonry, with which the Golden Dawn had certain links, women were welcomed as members and rose to positions of prominence. The Order was structured around the symbolism of the Cabala and organized into Temples which were run on strictly hierarchical lines.⁵ Authority was vested in leading individuals, and initiates were given a rigorous and systematic training in the "rejected" knowledge of Western hermeticism. They studied the symbolism of astrology, alchemy, and Cabala, were instructed in geomantic and tarot divination, and learned the underpinnings of basic magical techniques. A student progressed through the Grades of the Order by means of a series of examinations, but admission to the advanced Second (or Inner) Order was selective, a privilege rather

Greek authors. Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) revealed the Hermetic writings to be more modern in origin, and scholars currently assume dates ranging from A.D. 100 to 300. See Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Cambridge, 1986); Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 2–3; Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 163.

⁵ Several reliable and relatively recent studies of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn have helped to throw light on its organizational structure and membership. Particularly valuable because they include or draw on privately printed and unpublished sources, and are written by scholarly enthusiasts (rather than enthusiastic occultists), are Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887–1923* (London, 1972); R. A. Gilbert, *The Golden Dawn: Twilight of the Magicians* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1983), and *The Golden Dawn Companion: A Guide to the History, Structure, and Workings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1986). Yeats's scholarship has been enormously helpful in unraveling the complexities of the Golden Dawn and contextualizing it in literary and intellectual terms; see, for an early influential example, George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn* (London, 1974).

than a right.⁶ It was in the Second Order that adherents began to access the secrets of practical or operational magic, that is, magic as a unique undertaking through which invisible forces could be influenced and controlled in order to bring about specific change. This practical magical work was taken extremely seriously by the Order's leaders, and suitability for such an undertaking was assessed with care by senior adepts. Unlike its French occult counterparts, British Rosicrucianism, at least at the organizational level, was ever concerned with standards and respectability.⁷

When Aleister Crowley was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1898 as Frater Perdurabo ("I will endure"), he assumed, along with the other adherents, that he was entering a magical society with an unbroken magical pedigree. Convinced that he had found the secret mystical brotherhood referred to in Councillor von Eckartshausen's occult classic, *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary* (London, 1896), he threw himself into his magical studies with enthusiasm. Crowley, Cambridge-educated, highly intelligent, and capable of great powers of concentration, advanced quickly through the Grades of the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn. He was contemptuous of the bourgeois mundanity of many of his fellow initiates, impatient with the slow, pedantic methods of the Order, and eager to access the secrets of the cherished Second Order. His advancement, however, was blocked by senior officers, Yeats foremost among them, who were scandalized by Crowley's wild, unpredictable behavior and questionable morals. Crowley subsequently became involved in a bitter power struggle within the Golden Dawn, abandoned it in 1900, went on to study with other teachers, and finally established his own Order of the Silver Star. By 1909 he considered himself to be a master magician: wise in the ways of the ancient wisdom and skilled in the advanced techniques of operational magic. It was as a self-styled "Master" that he recruited Victor Neuburg and began to experiment with the sex magic that was later to help make him notorious.

The experiment in the desert in 1909, however, was not straightforwardly self-serving, as much of Crowley's magical Work was to become. Nor did it represent simply the indulgence of an exoticized and outlawed

⁶ The Second Order was established in 1892 and had a different name: Ordo Roseae Rubeae at Aureae Crucis (the Red Rose and the Cross of Gold). For the sake of clarity, however, I will follow the usual practice of referring to both orders as the Order of the Golden Dawn.

⁷ For fin-de-siècle French magic/occultism, which was much less "respectable" in tone, see Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (New York, 1972); Robert Pincus-Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the Salons de la Rose-Croix* (New York, 1976).

sexuality. What happened in the desert was the result of a serious, if misguided, attempt to access and explore a centuries-old magical system, and it represented an intense personal investment in the pursuit of magical knowledge. This essay will seek to examine the meaning and significance of this magical Work both in its own terms and the wider cultural context. In particular, it will locate a revitalized magical tradition in relation to the fin-de-siècle formulation of new sexual identities and a contemporary preoccupation with the riddle of human identity and consciousness as manifested in competing ideas of the Self. In situating the discussion within the conceptual framework implied by the term "subjectivity," I am relying in my analysis on a particular theoretical formulation of selfhood which underscores its contingency. The poststructuralist concept of subjectivity is suggestive of a self which is both stable and unstable, knowable and unknowable, constructed and unique. The central argument of the essay, however, is directed toward understanding fin-de-siècle advanced magical practice as a particular and self-conscious engagement with selfhood, an engagement which exposed the limitations of a unified sense of self on which experiential gendered identity depends.

North Africa

When Aleister Crowley arrived in Algiers with Victor Neuburg in November 1909, he undoubtedly evinced the unmistakable, subtly superior, air of the English gentleman abroad. His attitude to resident French officialdom was one of polite disdain, and he chose to ignore warnings that an unaccompanied trip through the desert could be dangerous. Crowley, confident and at ease, immediately set about buying the necessary provisions for the journey. He had a basic grasp of Arabic and understood a fair amount about Moslem culture, but he was concerned that Neuburg, with his "hangdog look" and "lunatic laugh," threatened to undermine his credibility. According to Crowley, therefore, Neuburg's head was shaved, leaving only two tufts at the temples which were "twisted up into horns." Crowley laughingly, but tellingly, comments that his chela was thus transformed into "a demon that I had tamed and trained to serve me as a familiar spirit. This greatly enhanced my eminence."⁸ A

⁸ See *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London, 1989), p. 626. Crowley wrote or dictated what he called his "autohagiography" during the 1920s, and it first appeared in edited form in the late 1960s. Crowley's reference to horns is, as we shall see, significant. His statement here is typical. Although he was writing tongue in cheek, he enjoyed a joke at Neuburg's expense, and probably did order the younger man to shave his head.

concern with eminence was ever uppermost in Crowley's mind, and he would justify it here as giving him the necessary status to travel unmoled through isolated desert terrain. The reference to demons and spirits, however, although joking, is an indication of how intimately Crowley lived with the magical realities that were his concern in his capacity as the magician, *Perdurabo*.

It was after spending only two nights sleeping under the desert stars that Crowley had the sudden insight that he must renew a magical undertaking begun in Mexico nine years earlier. This involved using a complex magical system developed by John Dee, the eminent Elizabethan mathematician and astrologer, and his clairvoyant, Edward Kelley. Dee and Kelley were well versed in practical Cabala and experimented with the angel magic of the Renaissance magician, Henry Cornelius Agrippa. Agrippa had elaborated a system of numerical and alphabetical tables for the summoning of angels, and it was within this framework that the two Elizabethans worked. Dee used Kelley's gifts as an expert scryer, one who could "travel" in the many realms of spirit existence, to vicariously enter into conversation with the angels in order to tempt from them the secrets of the universe. During their lengthy séances, Kelley would "scry in the spirit vision" using a shew-stone in much the same way as a seer might use a crystal ball. Dee asked his questions through Kelley and duly recorded the results. In this way, Dee slowly built up an entire cosmology of angels and demons, and sketched out thirty Aethyrs (or Aires)—realms of otherworldly existence.⁹

Crowley was familiar with Dee's researches because they had been integrated into the teachings of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Although he had been denied entry to the Second Order, Crowley had studied with other Golden Dawn adepts—most notably, Allan Bennett, considered second only to the highest-ranking member of the order. But whereas Golden Dawn initiates were set to study Dee's so-called Enochian system as a scholarly exercise, Crowley was prepared to test its efficacy. He was already skilled in exploring what the Golden Dawn referred to as the "Astral Light" and understood to be separate planes or orders of

⁹ John Dee (1527–1608) recorded these experiences in his spiritual diary, published by Meric Casaubon in 1659 as *A True and Faithful Relation of what passed for many years between Dr. John Dee . . . and some spirits . . .* (London, 1659). Dee's system, often referred to as the Book of Enoch, is in manuscript form, British Museum, London, Sloane MSS. 3189. It was, as we shall see, understood and taught by senior adepts of the Golden Dawn. Agrippa's "Ziruph Tables" appear in his *De occulta philosophia*, pp. 111, 24, first published in 1533. See Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 130–56.

existence which interpenetrate the world of earthly perceptions.¹⁰ He considered himself a master of astral travel, and was in the process of teaching its necessary techniques and procedures to Neuburg. These included total familiarity with the language of occult symbolism so vital to safe travel in astral realms. Indeed, although at one level an interior journey made from within the confines of the stationary physical body, astral travel was acknowledged by magicians to be potentially dangerous. Novices like Neuburg returned exhausted from their forays, but Crowley was no novice. Knowledgeable and expert in astral travel, familiar with the means of astral defense and attack, and cognizant of the spirit world, Crowley considered that he was ready to undertake a journey through Dee's Aethyrs.

Crowley's technique was simple. He would select a secluded spot and recite the appropriate Call—the ritual incantation which would give him access to the relevant Aethyr. After satisfying himself that the invoked forces were present, Crowley would take up his magical shewstone, a large golden topaz, and “scurry in the spirit vision” much as Kelley had done centuries before. He made “the topaz play a part not unlike that of the looking-glass in the case of *Alice*.”¹¹ By making the relevant Call and concentrating on the topaz, Crowley could enter the Aethyr. He was clear about what this meant: “When I say I was in any Aethyr, I simply mean in the state characteristic of, and peculiar to, its nature.”¹² In other words, Crowley recognized that this was a similar experience to that of astral travel; it was conducted within his own mind. Having accessed the Aethyr, he would describe his experiences to Neuburg, who would write them down. It is noteworthy that, typically, Crowley adapted the procedure to suit himself. Unlike Dee, he, the master magician, would be his own scribe. Neuburg, whom Crowley recognized to be a gifted clairvoyant, was the scribe.

As the two men made their way through the desert, Crowley increasingly fell under the spell of his experiences in John Dee's Aethyrs. He encountered celestial beings, both terrible and beautiful, who divulged

¹⁰ The *Golden Dawn* followed Eliphas Lévi, the French occultist, in referring to planes other than the physical as the Astral Light. It has a somewhat different meaning from the “astral plane” of the Theosophists. See King, *Modern Ritual Magic*, p. 56.

¹¹ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 616.

¹² Ibid. Crowley provides an early description of the Aethyrs (presumably based on Neuburg's notes and his own memory) in “The Vision and the Voice,” *Equinox* 1, no. 5, suppl. (March 1911): 1–176. He asked Israel Regardie to prepare a full manuscript version in 1929, and the subsequent published edition is based on this manuscript together with Regardie's introduction. See Aleister Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice* (Dallas, 1972). *The Vision and the Voice* is precisely that: a record of Crowley's visions in the Aethyrs, and of the voices he heard there.

in richly symbolic language something of the realms in which they dwelt. Crowley understood much of the symbolism and began to realize that the Calls did indeed give the scribe access to an intricate but cogent and coherent universal system of other worlds and beings. But as the Calls proceeded, Crowley began increasingly to feel something very akin to fear. It was as though, he says, a hand was holding his heart while a whispering breath enveloped him in words both awful and enchanting. In a gender reversal that was to typify much of this magical experience, Crowley reveals that he “began to feel—well, not exactly frightened; it was the subtle trembling of a maiden before the bridegroom.”¹³ In order to fortify himself against growing feelings of awe and dread, he began to recite the Koran as he marched across the desert. The great stretches of empty landscape, hot by day and icy at night, and continuous intoning of magical and religious formulae, combined to effect a state of almost overwhelming spiritual intensity.

A little over two weeks after arriving in Algiers, Crowley and Neuburg reached Bou Saada. This isolated haven in the desert, with its palm trees, gardens, and orchards, was where the desert road ran out. Bou Saada gave the impression of a last link with civilization. Some distance from the town was a mountain, Mount Da'leh Addin. It was here that Crowley, acting on instructions from previous angelic interlocutors, made Dee's Call and attempted to enter the fourteenth Aethyr. His attempt, however, was thwarted. He was met by “an all-glorious Angel,” surrounded with blackness “and the crying of beasts.” The angel issued a warning and instructed the magician to withdraw. Shaken, Crowley prepared to return to Bou Saada. As he did so, “suddenly came the command to perform a magical ceremony on the summit” of the mountain. Whatever form the “command” took, Crowley experienced it as absolute. He and Neuburg responded by building a great circle with loose rocks. They inscribed the circle with magical words of power, “erected an altar” in its midst, and there, in Crowley's words, “I sacrificed myself. The fire of the all-seeing sun smote down upon the altar, consuming every particle of my personality.”¹⁴

What happened in prosaic terms was that Crowley was sodomized by Neuburg in a homosexual rite offered to the god Pan. Pan, the man-goat, had a particular significance for the two men. Crowley not only revered him as the diabolic god of lust and magic, Neuburg literally had what acquaintances described as an elfin and “faunlike” appearance.¹⁵

¹³ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 619.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 621.

¹⁵ See Ethel Archer, *The Hieroglyph* (London, 1932). This loosely autobiographical novel provides compelling portraits of Crowley and Neuburg during the pre-1914 pe-

It is likely that what happened on Mount Da'leh Addin was a classic invocation: the young chela, in accordance with accepted magical technique, probably "called down" or invoked the god Pan. A successful invocation would result in the neophyte becoming "inflamed" by the power of the god. If this is what happened during the ceremony on the mountain, Neuburg, in his magical capacity, would momentarily identify with all that the man-goat god represented. Put simply, Neuburg with his tufted "horns" would become Pan—the "faunlike" yet savage lover of Crowley's psychosexual world. Although Crowley and Neuburg were involved in a homosexual relationship, this may well have been the first time that the two men performed a magical homosexual act. Crowley quickly came to believe that sex magic was an unrivaled means to great magical power and became one of its most innovative practitioners. The image of Pan was to haunt Neuburg for the rest of his life. It inspired some of his best early poetry but later filled him with dread. The experience was overwhelming for both men, but it temporarily devastated Crowley. His summation was brief, "There was an animal in the wilderness," he writes, "but it was not I."¹⁶

Crowley remembered nothing of his return to Bou Saada. As he slowly came to himself, however, he knew that he was changed: "I knew who I was and all the events of my life; but I no longer made myself the centre of their sphere. . . . I did not exist. . . . All things were alike as shadows sweeping across the still surface of a lake—their images had no meaning for the water, no power to stir its silence."¹⁷ Crowley felt that he had ceremonially crossed the Abyss—a term reminiscent of Nietzsche (whom Crowley greatly admired), but denoting the last terrible journey that a magician must make before he could justifiably lay claim to the highest levels of adeptship. Master of the Temple, a Grade of enlightened initiation achieved in Crowley's own magical Order only after crossing the Abyss, meant renunciation of all that life meant. The Order of the Golden Dawn taught that such awareness could not be accessed this side of death, and Crowley affirmed this in his own way. He taught that becoming a Master of the Temple implied not simply symbolic death and

riod. Archer's descriptions of Newton in the novel reflect the general observations about Neuburg. They emphasize his infectious "irresponsible" laughter, youthful features, and "faunlike" appearance. Neuburg retained a fay, elfin quality throughout his life.

¹⁶ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 621. *The Vision and the Voice*, p. 134, n. 9, gives scant details of the "sacrifice." See also Jean Overton Fuller, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg* (London, 1965), pp. 154–55. Overton Fuller knew Neuburg during the 1930s, and her book (while not always accurate about the occult) is an invaluable source of biographical information. Crowley and Neuburg went on to perfect a form of homosexual magical Working before their final bitter separation in 1914. See also n. 75 below.

¹⁷ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 621.

rebirth, a concept familiar to all magical initiates, but the annihilation of the personal self. The Abyss, then, was closely associated with the death of the individual—although not necessarily on the physical level.

A few days later, Crowley, who in the aftermath of the "sacrifice" on Mount Da'leh Addin had already acknowledged that at one level "I did not exist," prepared formally to undergo the Abyss ordeal. He understood that he would do so when he entered John Dee's tenth Aethyr. He knew that in the tenth Aethyr he must meet and defeat the terrible "Choronzon, the mighty devil that inhabiteth the outermost Abyss."¹⁸ He also knew that he could do so only as Perdurabo, a magical adept, and that success depended on his ability to master Choronzon through the dominating power of the magical Will. The complex techniques, rituals, and paraphernalia of magical practice are the means by which a magician develops and "inflames" his Will, the single most important attribute of a magician. Crowley understood that Choronzon's power could be bound and brought under control only through the silent but relentless application of the magical Will and that this was critical for a successful crossing of the Abyss. Failure to force Choronzon into submission would enslave the magician to him, bringing disaster in its wake. Given this, and the warnings he had received in the previous Aethyrs, Crowley changed his magical procedure.

On December 6, 1909, Crowley and Neuburg left Bou Saada and went far out into the desert until they found a suitable valley in the dunes. Here they traced a circle in the sand, inscribing it with the various sacred names of God. A triangle was then traced in close proximity, its perimeters likewise inscribed with divine names and also with that of Choronzon. This was correct magical practice. The magic circle provided protection for the magician; the Triangle of Art was intended to contain any visible manifestation of the forces "called up" or evoked by Perdurabo. The process of evocation was designed to produce a physical materialization of, in this case, the demonic inhabitant of the Abyss. Three pigeons were sacrificed and their blood placed at the three corners, Crowley taking particular care that it remained within the confines of the figure. The blood was to facilitate and help sustain any physical manifestation, and it was essential that this remain within the triangle. At this point Neuburg entered the circle. He was armed with a magic dagger, and had strict instructions to use it if anything—even anything that looked like Crowley—attempted to break into the circle. At Crowley's instigation, Neuburg swore an oath to defend its inviolability with his life. Crowley, dressed in his ceremonial black robe, then made an astonishing departure

¹⁸ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, p. 153.

from accepted ritual practice. Instead of joining his chela in the relative safety of the circle, he entered the Triangle of Art. While Neuburg performed the Banishing Rituals of the Pentagram and Hexagram, a procedure designed to protect him, Crowley made the Call of the tenth Aethyr.¹⁹

The mighty Choronzon announced himself from within the shewstone with a great cry, "Zazas, Zazas, Nasatanada Zazas": "I am I. . . . From me come leprosy and pox and plague and cancer and cholera and the falling sickness. Ah! I will reach up to the knees of the Most High, and tear his phallus with my teeth, and I will bray his testicles in a mortar, and make poison thereof, to slay the sons of men."²⁰

Crowley probably uttered these words. Thereafter, however, as far as Neuburg could tell, Crowley fell silent; he remained seated in the triangle in the sand, robed and hooded, deeply withdrawn, and "did not move or speak during the ceremony."²¹ It was Neuburg who both heard and saw. Unlike the previous Calls, when he had acted merely as scribe, Neuburg now beheld, not Crowley seated within the triangle, but all that Crowley conjured. Before him appeared Choronzon in the guise of a beautiful woman whom he had known and loved in Paris, and she tried to lure him from the circle. She was followed by a holy man and a serpent.

Slowly the demon in his various manifestations managed to engage the inexperienced Neuburg in discussion, and then he proceeded to mock him: had he not, "O talkative One," been instructed to hold no converse with the mighty Choronzon? Undoubtedly Neuburg had been so instructed by Crowley, but in the heat of the moment he forgot himself. During the intense debate that ensued, with Neuburg scribbling furiously to record every detail, Choronzon began stealthily to erase the protective edges of the circle in the sand. Suddenly, Choronzon sprang from the triangle into the circle and wrestled Neuburg to the ground. The scribe

¹⁹ John Symonds, *King of the Shadow Realm* (London, 1989), p. 118, notes that this is the only recorded instance of a magician seating himself within the triangle during an evocation. If Crowley really knew what he was doing, he must also have known that in magical terms he was taking a tremendous risk. He was inviting obsession by the demon. Crowley is cautious about revealing his exact position, perhaps not wanting others to emulate him, but it is clear from *The Vision and the Voice* that he was indeed inside the triangle.

²⁰ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, p. 161. The phrase "I am I" has a Biblical resonance, but it was also used in Madame Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy* to connote "the true individuality" (as opposed to the temporal personality) of a human being. Although Crowley did not adhere consistently to a Theosophical understanding of the self, he would certainly have been familiar with Blavatsky's work. See H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (1889; reprint, London, 1968), pp. 33–34.

²¹ Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, p. 162.

found himself struggling with a demon in the shape of "a naked savage," a strong man who tried to tear out his throat with "froth-covered fangs." Neuburg, invoking the magical names of God, struck out with his dagger and finally forced the writhing figure back into the triangle. The chela repaired the circle, and Choronzon resumed his different manifestations and ravings. Cajoling, tempting, decrying, pleading, he continued to debate and attempt to undermine the scribe. Finally, the manifestations began to fade. The triangle emptied.²²

Neuburg now became aware of Crowley who was sitting alone in the triangle. He watched as Crowley wrote the name BABALON, signifying the defeat of Choronzon, in the sand with his Holy Ring.²³ The ceremony was concluded. It had lasted over two hours. The two men lit a great fire of purification, and obliterated the circle and the triangle. They had undergone a terrible ordeal. Crowley states that he had "astrally identified" himself with Choronzon throughout and had "experienced each anguish, each rage, each despair, each insane outburst."²⁴ Neuburg, however, had held forbidden converse with the Dweller of the Abyss. Both men now felt that they understood the nature of the Abyss. It represented Dispersion: a terrifying chaos in which there was no center and no controlling consciousness. Its fearsome Dweller was not an individual but the personification of a magnitude of malignant forces made manifest through the massed energy of the evoking magician. But to experience these forces at the most immediate and profoundly personal level, and to believe, as Neuburg did, that he been involved in a fight to the death with them, was shattering. As Crowley says, "I hardly know how we ever got back to Bou Saada."²⁵

Over the next two weeks Crowley and Neuburg continued the Calls as they made their way toward Biskra, a desert journey of over a hundred miles. Some of Crowley's experiences in the Aethyrs were lyrical hymns of beauty and ecstasy, but others seemed full of foreboding—suggesting that he had stumbled into a world for which he was not yet prepared. By the time they reached Biskra on December 16, Crowley knew that he was perilously close to the absolute limit of his powers. Four days later he concluded the final Call. The magical Work was finished. The

²² Crowley, *Confessions* (n. 8 above), p. 623.

²³ This name had tremendous significance for Crowley. Its symbolism is complex, but the spelling is an adaptation of the Babylon of the Apocalypse as given to him in *The Book of the Law* (London, 1938) (referred to hereafter). Crowley later recognized BABALON as the feminine or androgynous equivalent of Pan. The name was synonymous for him with the biblical Scarlet Woman, the title later bestowed on his most important female lovers and magical consorts.

²⁴ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 623.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 624.

two men were utterly exhausted, but not by the hardships of the physical journey which Crowley, at least, found delightful. It was the magical experience that had taken its toll. Those who knew them said that Neuburg "bore the marks of this magical adventure to the grave" and that Crowley, shattered psychologically, never recovered from the ordeal.²⁶ The two men recuperated in Biskra before returning to Algiers. They sailed for England on the last day of December 1909.

"I, too, am the Soul of the Desert"²⁷

Although Crowley was casual about the mise-en-scène of the Calls, it is unlikely that the setting for this magical undertaking was mere accident. "Arabia" and the desert held a special significance for him. Crowley reveled in Arab, or, more specifically, Bedouin, culture. After a long day's tramp, he claimed to enjoy nothing more than to join the men of a remote village to while away the night drinking coffee and smoking tobacco or "kif" (hashish). He was already familiar with the effects of a "huqqa . . . laden with maddening cannabis," and felt emancipated by the desert and its society.²⁸ Crowley acknowledged that, while his spiritual self was at home in China, his "heart and hand are pledged to the Arab."²⁹ When he spoke of "the Arab," however, his abiding identification was with what he took to be the spirit of desert culture—the strong ties that bound man to man and an existence pared down to the aestheticized essentials. A romanticized ethos of masculinity was one of the aspects of "Arabia" which had particular resonance for him.

A great deal has been written about the European fascination with the desert, the romanticization of the Bedouin, and the creation in travel literature and elsewhere of a particular mythic "Orient."³⁰ Crowley was

²⁶ Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (Las Vegas, 1989), pp. 409–10.

²⁷ Aleister Crowley, "The Soul of the Desert," *The Occult Review* 20 (July–December 1914): 18. The full citation reads: "I, too, am the Soul of the Desert; thou shalt seek me yet again in the wilderness of sand."—*Liber LXV*, v. 61." (This is a reference to Aleister Crowley, *Liber LXV, The Book of the Heart girt with the Serpent* [London, 1909–10]).

²⁸ Aleister Crowley, *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (n.p., 1910; reprint, Chicago, 1991), p. 117. Crowley had experimented with hashish since 1906 and had discovered that controlled use could "push introspection to the limit." He wrote and later published "The Herb Dangerous—(Part 2) The Psychology of Hashish," *Equinox* 1, no. 2 (September 1909): 31–89, in which he records his views. See also Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 586.

²⁹ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 587.

³⁰ The milestone text in this fast developing genre is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), but earlier commentators were not slow to recognize the construction of a particular "Arabia" in the writing of explorers and travelers. See, e.g., Ahmad 'Abd Allah and T. Compton Pakenham, *Dreamers of Empire* (London, 1930); R. H. Kiernan,

not immune to these fictions. While his firsthand experience of the desert was powerful and direct, his affinity with "the Arab" had a different basis. When he assumed that he had intuitively penetrated the heart of the desert Arab, that he understood at an unspoken level the profound affect on the human spirit of living in unmediated dialogue with what he called the eight genii of the desert, it was because he had read so avidly in the "Arabia Deserta" literature.³¹ And if there is a subtext for Crowley's North African adventure, indeed, for all his travels, it was the life and work of the Victorian adventurer and explorer, Richard Burton.

Burton represented the kind of man Crowley most wished to be—strong, courageous, intrepid, but also a learned scholar-poet, and a man who jibed at conventional restraints. His dark, scarred face and satanic aura seemed to suggest knowledge and powers beyond the accepted and acceptable, his exploits in Africa and the Near East were legendary, and his translations of Italian, Latin, Arabic, and Sanskrit texts had introduced a Victorian readership to European and "oriental" folklore and erotica.³² A man of astonishing breadth and capabilities, Burton was without doubt a model for Crowley. When he undertook his lengthy travels in remote places, Crowley felt that he was "treading, though reverently and afar off, in the footsteps of my boyhood's hero, Richard Francis Burton."³³ He was one of three men to whom Crowley dedicated his *Confessions*: "the perfect pioneer of spiritual and physical adventure."

Crowley aspired to the kind of cultural mastery exhibited in Burton's famous 1853 "pilgrimage" to Mecca, when the explorer, perfectly disguised as a Muslim, had penetrated to the heart of a holy city denied to Europeans. Crowley's flamboyant use of a star sapphire ring during his North African travels with Neuburg was based on Burton's information that the stone was venerated by Muslims. According to Crowley,

The Unveiling of Arabia (London, 1937); Thomas J. Assad, *Three Victorian Travellers: Burton, Blount, Doughty* (London, 1964); Michael Foss, "Dangerous Guides: English Writers and the Desert," *New Middle East* 9 (June 1969): 38–42; and Peter Brent, *Far Arabia, Explorers of the Myth* (London, 1977).

³¹ The phrase is taken from Charles M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (Cambridge, 1888). The eight genii, according to Crowley, were Sun, Space, Wind, Water, Earth, Fire, Wood, Moon. See "The Soul of the Desert," p. 21.

³² Richard Burton (1821–90) was the author of numerous books and toward the end of his life concentrated increasingly on the translation and publication for private circulation of erotica. His works include *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*, 3 vols. (London, 1855–56), *Wanderings in West Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1863), *Unexplored Syria*, with Charles F. Tyrwhitt-Drake, 2 vols. (London, 1872), *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*, trans. with F. F. Arbuthnot (Cosmopoli [London?], 1883), *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, 10 vols. (Benares, 1885–88), and *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui*, translated from the French (Cosmopoli [London?], 1886).

³³ Crowley, *Confessions* (n. 8 above), p. 461.

he put a stop to a coffee shop brawl by calmly walking into the scrimmage and inscribing magical figures in the air with the ring while intoning a chapter from the Koran: "The fuss stopped instantly, and a few minutes later the original parties to the dispute came to me and begged me to decide between them, for they saw that I was a saint."³⁴ Although Crowley's account is self-parodying, he was, like Burton, implicated in the imperialist project. Both men rejected the stifling restrictions of Victorian society, and, in different ways, sought to dissociate themselves from bourgeois notions of sober, restrained, industrious manhood. Nevertheless, while genuinely revering Arab culture and its peoples, they equally epitomized that unreflective assumption of superiority and desire for mastery that was integral to imperialist endeavors.³⁵ These issues, however, are complex. In the case of Burton and Crowley, neither a sense of superiority nor the drive for mastery was necessarily equated with the ruthless repression of the feminine that (following Freud) is often associated with accounts of modern masculine subjectivity. If the two men conformed in certain respects to the classic profile of the imperialist, they were also drawn to a culture which could apparently accommodate the expression of the feminine as an intrinsic part of virile masculinity. Imperialism invariably implies a degree of feminization, but Crowley, influenced by Burton, viewed Arab culture as a positive and irresistible blend of the masculine and feminine.

"El Islam," Burton had noted, "seems purposely to have loosened the ties between the sexes in order to strengthen the bonds which connect man and man."³⁶ This is suggestive of both the profoundly masculinist society of Crowley's imagination and its mirror image, and Burton was in part responsible for this particular characterization of the East. He had long been fascinated by "oriental" erotica when, late in life, he committed his considerable erudition to paper with the publication of his studies of Eastern pederasty. Through these and other writings, "Arabia" had become synonymous in the European imagination with homosexuality.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., p. 626.

³⁵ Edward Said's reading of Burton (in *Orientalism*, pp. 196–97) as a man who preferred Eastern life and culture while retaining an abiding commitment to the concept of empire is applicable to Crowley.

³⁶ Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa* (London, 1856), p. 38, cited in Fawn M. Brodie, *The Devil Rides: A Life of Sir Richard Burton* (New York, 1967), p. 105.

³⁷ See Richard Burton's "Terminal Essay" in the *Arabian Nights*. The manuscript on which he was working at the time of his death, *The Scented Garden*, was a new translation (this time from the original Arabic) of *The Perfumed Garden*. The projected publication was to include a previously omitted chapter on homosexuality. The themes of homosexuality and castration with which Burton was dealing greatly upset his wife, and she destroyed the manuscript after his death.

It is not insignificant that in the year in which Crowley and Neuburg tramped across the desert, T. E. Lawrence—later to be immortalized as Lawrence of Arabia—was undertaking a walking tour in the Middle East and that rumors concerning Lawrence's homosexuality were linked with his early close relationship with an Arab assistant. It is also relevant that Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas had anticipated Crowley's discovery of Algeria and enjoyed all that Algiers had to offer. Indeed, Wilde had arranged for a tremulous André Gide to spend the night with a young male Arab in that city, so confirming for Gide his own sexual identity.³⁸ For these European men, an apparent acceptance of *le vice contra nature* was part of the lure of the Arab world. Although it went far deeper than that for Crowley, as for Lawrence, the desert signified the expression—often the honorable expression—of a heterodox male sexuality.

Crowley's love of the desert, though, and its relationship to expressive sexuality, was more complex than this. In "The Soul of the Desert," published in 1914, Crowley writes a lyrical paean to the mystical power of this "wilderness of sand."³⁹ The desert, he says, has the power to strip a man of everything that he has and is, until he must finally stand naked in the face of the elements. So, he writes, "at last the Ego is found alone, unmasked, conscious of itself and of no other thing."⁴⁰ There is simply the unreflective consciousness of one who tramps through the dunes. It is this, an uncomplicated acknowledgment of what *is*, that makes it possible to love in the desert "as it is utterly impossible to do in any other conditions."⁴¹ Here, a shared glance, a chosen place in the sand, and "life thrills in sleepy unison; all, all in silence, not names or vows exchanged, but with clean will an act accomplished." "Love itself becomes simple as the rest of life."⁴²

This simple love, an effect of the crystallized intensity of desert existence, is a prelude to "the bodily ecstasy of dissolution, the pang of bodily death, wherein the Ego for a moment that is an aeon loses the fatal consciousness of itself, and becoming one with that of another, foreshadows to itself that greater sacrament of death, when 'the spirit returns to God that gave it.'"⁴³ But Crowley goes further. In "The Soul of the Desert," "the wilderness of sand" becomes the figurative realization of

³⁸ See Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 3–6.

³⁹ Crowley, "The Soul of the Desert" (n. 27 above), p. 18.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴¹ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 655.

⁴² Crowley, "The Soul of the Desert," pp. 22–23.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 23.

an eroticized spirituality. It is equated with an ecstatic experience which far outstrips an orgasmic loss of sense of self—the “little death” of sexual climax. The desert, with its wastes of endless sand, inescapable solitude, and implacable indifference to the miserable struggles of humanity, is parent to the quintessential mystical experience: the dissolution of “the soul . . . into the abounding bliss of God.” And, for Crowley, this “dissolution” is synonymous with what he calls here “the annihilation of the Self in Pan.” The coded reference to Crowley’s relationship with Neuburg, and the sacrificial ceremony undertaken with him on the summit of Da’leh Addin in 1909, is clear. In a marked eroticization of the supremely spiritual, Crowley writes: “Such must be the climax of any [magical] retirement to the desert.”⁴⁴

“It Was Like Jekyll and Hyde . . .”

Crowley used “Self,” “Ego,” and “Soul” as interrelated, if not synonymous, terms. Speaking of the “sacrifice” on Mount Da’leh Addin, he could say that every particle of his “personality” was consumed; elsewhere, he talks of “the annihilation of the Self in Pan.” Similarly, he writes of that moment of crisis in the desert “when it becomes necessary to penetrate beneath the shadow-show to the secret sanctuary of the soul,”⁴⁵ and, of that same moment, that “at last the Ego is found alone, unmasked, conscious of itself and of no other thing.” It was never Crowley’s concern to provide a precise ontology of human identity, and he drew on an eclectic metaphysics when he alluded to the nature of being. Crowley’s commentaries, however, suggest that he predicated his experiential sense of self on both an esoteric and a liberal-humanist understanding of a unique individual essence. He understood a good deal about the “shadow-show” of personality pyrotechnics that exemplified the man Aleister Crowley but adhered to the notion of a “secret sanctuary of the soul” as a kind of occult shrine of the ultimate “Self.” The “moment of crisis in the desert” signifies a stripping away of the layers of the “personality”—a crucial unmasking in preparation for the unveiling of this final “Self.”

Crowley was a man who knew all about masks. He delighted in playing with identity. At Cambridge he had become an ardent Jacobite, changing his name from Alexander to Aleister (a misspelling of its Gaelic

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 23–24. By “magical retirement,” Crowley means a magical retreat—a period devoted to magical practice and spiritual introspection. This was how he viewed the 1909 experiences.

⁴⁵ Crowley, *Confessions* (n. 8 above), pp. 627–28.

equivalent) and afterward adopted the spurious persona of Lord Boleskine, a Highland laird. Shortly after his initiation into the Golden Dawn, he had taken a flat in London under the name of Count Vladimir Svareff and enjoyed posing as a young Russian nobleman. In Cairo in 1904 Crowley decided to pass himself off as a Persian prince and became Prince Chioa Khan. While these experiments were undertaken in a spirit of fun and adventure, they were also undoubtedly due to a certain restiveness on Crowley’s part over his given position in life. Crowley’s wealth and education insured his social acceptability, but his strict puritanical background and family ties to trade were far removed from his romantic fantasies of aristocratic lineage and lifestyle. Crowley longed to be other than a brewer’s son.⁴⁶

These adopted identities, however, were never anything more than a rich man’s indulgent fictions. There is no sense, for example, that Crowley lived as Chioa Khan in the same way that both Burton and Lawrence lived as Arabs. Indeed, this was never his intention. Crowley’s impersonation of a Persian prince was simply the occasion for a piece of exotic showmanship, an opportunity to dress up in a series of gorgeous silk robes and swagger about the streets of Cairo. There is no sense in which Crowley experienced himself as *traumatically* “divided.” He did not have Burton’s abiding conviction that he was two men or Lawrence’s painful awareness of psychic dissonance in which he literally embodied the dislocation identified in theoretical discussions of masquerade.⁴⁷ Crowley’s assumption of different identities was, as he readily acknowledged, mere playacting. He did not experience his various *dramatis personae* as “selves.”

This was not the case with his magical identity. Crowley was *Perdurabo*, and it was as a master magician that he traveled through the timeless Aethyrs of a sixteenth-century Magus. The magical self was part of Crowley’s concept of selfhood, but in a specific sense. From the time of his initiation into the Golden Dawn, Crowley, like other initiates,

⁴⁶ Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) was born to Edward and Emily Crowley, Plymouth Brethren of the strictest kind. The family fortune had been made in the brewery trade, but Edward Crowley had long since removed himself from direct involvement with the business. The Crowley family lived a retired, respectable life, and, until his death in 1887, Edward Crowley had devoted himself to preaching.

⁴⁷ See Mary Ann Doane, “Film and Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,” *Screen* 23, nos. 3/4 (1982): 74–87. Doane draws on Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” *Formations of Pleasure*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London, 1986), pp. 35–44. See, with particular reference to T. E. Lawrence, Kaja Silverman, “White Skin, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis, or With Lawrence in Arabia,” *Differences* 1, no. 5 (1989): 3–54. It is interesting to note that, while the relationship of Crowley, Burton, and Lawrence to imposture and disguise is different, all three men had a vested interest in masking their origins and uncertain social position.

gained an understanding of magic as bound up in complex and interrelated ways with the person of the magician and the operation of the magical Will. By 1900 he was experimenting with the conscious movement between two separate selves and had perfected a practice which owed much, he says, to Robert Louis Stevenson: "As a member of the Second Order [of the Golden Dawn], I wore a certain jewelled ornament of gold upon my heart. I arranged that when I had it on, I was to permit no thought, word or action, save such as pertained directly to my magical aspirations. When I took it off I was, on the contrary, to permit no such things: I was to be utterly uninitiate. It was like Jekyll and Hyde, but with the two personalities balanced and complete in themselves."⁴⁸ Crowley's reference to R. L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is instructive. This highly popular novel, published in 1886, features a respectable doctor who uses his specialized knowledge to create a second self which manifests in his body through a process of startling transformation. The loathsome Mr. Hyde—"the beast Hyde"—is the literal embodiment of everything his creator is not; he is the shadow side of the late Victorian bourgeois male. Hyde understands nothing of sober self-restraint and freely indulges his craving for unspecified "secret pleasures." The implication that Hyde's nocturnal escapades were sexual as well as violent was clear in the sensational London stage adaptation which opened in August 1888, and W. T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette* was quick to link the play with the gruesome Jack the Ripper murders of five prostitutes in London's East End that autumn. In the furor that followed, the play was closed.⁴⁹

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde articulates specific anxieties about bourgeois masculinity. By the 1880s significant cracks had appeared in the conventional formulation of the decent, disciplined, God-fearing gentleman as the epitome of middle-class male respectability. Late Victorian concerns over prostitution, pornography, venereal disease, the moral welfare of children, and the safety of respectable women on city streets centered on a series of public campaigns which promoted the representation of male sexuality as predatory and dangerous.⁵⁰ In the rhetoric of these cam-

⁴⁸ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 204. Denied entry to the Second Order by the London adepts, Crowley had been initiated in Paris by the Golden Dawn's Chief (S. L. MacGregor Mathers), who was at odds with the London leadership.

⁴⁹ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 206–8, discusses W. T. Stead's journalistic approach to the Ripper crimes and his use of Jekyll and Hyde "as a psychological model of the murderer."

⁵⁰ For a discussion of these issues, see Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York, 1980); Frank Mort, *Danger-*

paigns, married and single men were equally a source of concern. Indeed, although the marriage bed and supposedly redemptive qualities of pure Victorian womanhood had traditionally been seen as a bulwark against male profligacy, there was a growing sense that marriage merely exposed women to licensed sexual exploitation. An undifferentiated "male lust" accounted for the seemingly endemic spread of "vice," and social purity groups and vigilance committees mobilized throughout the country to combat its influence. Although Stevenson sought to deny any implicit reference to sexuality in his novel, the masculine world it depicts was widely regarded as the setting for a graphic representation of the debased Hyde in Everyman—the vile and murderous debaucher lurking beneath the surface of urbane gentility. The 1888 play made explicit the target of the villain's lusts.

But *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is also centrally concerned with the idea of the divided self and is equally a refiguring of the concept of dual personality which played on a fin-de-siècle fascination with duality, fragmentation, and disintegration. In the novel, Dr. Jekyll can only speak of his other self, his "devil," via the disclaimer "he" ("He, I say—I cannot say, I"), while the potion with the power to turn a Jekyll into a Hyde is represented as an assault on "the very fortress of identity."⁵¹ The novel's implied challenge to the notion of a unified self as the single source of identity was echoed elsewhere as the century drew to a close, and this was perhaps particularly marked in contemporary discussion of the human mind. Indeed, there is some indication that Stevenson was familiar with developments in European psychology and that he had been "deeply impressed" by a "scientific" paper he had read in French on "subconsciousness."⁵² The late Victorian period witnessed an explosion of interest in the uncharted territory of mind and consciousness and the relationship among mind, body, and sexual pathology. It was exemplified by new approaches in the relatively new field of medical psychology, the pioneering work of sexologists, and the establishment in London of

ous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England since 1830 (London, 1987). Walkowitz, in *City of Dreadful Delight*, is concerned with the narrative expression of the concept of sexual danger and engages in a detailed discussion of the contradictory implications of Stead's crusade against child prostitution.

⁵¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories*, ed. Jenni Calder (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 94, 83. The quote is cited in a helpful discussion to which I am indebted; see Stephen Heath, "Psychopathia Sexualis: Stevenson's *Strange Case*," in *Futures for English*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester, 1988), pp. 96, 97. Heath notes that the initial definite article was absent from the title of the novel in its first edition.

⁵² Stevenson's wife made this observation in connection with *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. See Heath, p. 106, n. 8.

the Society for Psychical Research.⁵³ In France, the renowned Jean Martin Charcot was making bold interpretations of the bodily manifestations of psychological states, while Sigmund Freud, who worked with Charcot in the 1880s, was seeking to sever a necessary connection between physical cause and psychological effect. The Society for Psychical Research, which boasted as corresponding members many of the foremost international medical psychologists of the day, followed and participated in these debates in an effort better to comprehend the nature of noumenal experience and psychic (in the sense of supernatural or paranormal) phenomena.⁵⁴ What these different approaches and agendas had in common was a mutual commitment to understanding the complexities of emotional and psychological experience.

Increasingly, attention was focused on the conundrum of inexplicable bodily symptoms, hysteria, split and multiple personalities, and altered states of consciousness. At the same time, explanatory models which relied for their efficacy on the concept of a single, stable consciousness as the authorial root of behavior and meaning were seen to be outmoded and inadequate. The mansion of the mind, it seemed, contained many rooms—some of them dark, subterranean, and not easy of access. The mind was revealed to be a labyrinth only parts of which were available to conscious self-scrutiny. This interpretation suggested that the psyche might best be understood in terms of division and fragmentation rather than unitary wholeness. At its most extreme, it proposed that the mind—the seat of conscious identity—existed as a state of per-

⁵³ Sexology was introduced in Britain by Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 7 vols., vol. 1 (London, 1897), published as a set (Philadelphia, 1910); and by Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study* (Stuttgart, 1886; English trans., Philadelphia and London, 1892), which was published in the same year as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882 and led by a group of highly educated individuals, most of whom were Oxbridge men. Its goal was the scrupulous and impartial investigation of paranormal phenomena. The society was extremely interested in spiritualist mediumship as a possible guide to the unknown power of the mind. One of its leaders, Frederic Myers, postulated a "subliminal consciousness" and "subliminal self" as the key to understanding so-called spirit communications and manifestations. See Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London, 1968), pp. 275–312; and Oppenheim (n. 2 above), pp. 249–66.

⁵⁴ See J. M. Charcot, *Leçons du Mardi à la Salpêtrière, Polyclinique du Mars*, 1889 (Paris, 1889), and *Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System*, trans. George Sigerson (London, 1887). Charcot drew attention to the sexual nature of hysterical body language with his infamous "arc en cercle"—the orgasmic paroxysm of a major hysterical convulsion. Freud further developed the connection between hysteria and the sexual, drawing attention to the manifestation of physical symptoms as a language of sexuality. Havelock Ellis and Frederic Myers (of the Society for Psychical Research) were among the first to introduce Sigmund Freud's work to Britain during the 1890s.

petual anomie. Whether intended or not, these new areas of research constituted an implied assault on the integrity of the rational autonomous individual.

The founding of the Order of the Golden Dawn coincided with and, I would argue, directly addressed these contemporary concerns. It is surely no accident that the final flowering of the occult revival centrally involved practices like astral travel or that advanced magical practice taught adepts how to develop a second magical self which would conduct lengthy forays into worlds which were conceived as simultaneously inner and outer. But while these exercises can be interpreted as remarkable and sustained explorations of the psyche, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century magicians were not concerned with theorizing the mind. They were absorbed in the magical enterprise, and their conceptual grasp of the endeavor was expressed in these terms. Magicians certainly understood that in pursuing magical knowledge and power they were also undertaking a journey within, but they spoke not of psyche but of planes and Aethyrs. Magical practice was dedicated to understanding and gaining control of these planes, and adepts were not overly concerned with whether or not such realms had an objective or subjective existence. What mattered was that the magical enterprise could be shared with and verified by other magicians, and its authenticity was judged by the success of the desired outcome. The absolute reality of the experience was accepted without question.

Magical practice sought to develop a powerful and effective second self which would explore the spheres beyond conscious awareness. This second self, however, was not the dissociated personality of spiritualist mediumship or psychological disorder. When he suggested that the existence of his two selves, the initiate and "uninitiate" personalities, was somehow similar to the divided self of Dr. Jekyll, Crowley was simply acknowledging the relevance of the novel's central theme to magical practice. The key difference for Crowley between himself and Dr. Jekyll lay in the fact that Crowley's "two personalities [are] balanced and complete in themselves." Crowley would also have wished to argue that Perdurabo was no monster. He was an initiated magical self and in no sense represented a personal crisis of identity. The point here is that an experienced magician is in control, via a ritualized series of practices, of the initiated personality, can access it at will, and hold it in perfect balance with the mundane self. In the true adept, there is no blurring of the line. It is in a magical sense, then, that Crowley acknowledged not one self but (over time) many. And because of his magical training, he did not experience this as a *problematic* splitting: "It was like Jekyll

and Hyde, but with the two personalities balanced and complete in themselves."

As the new century unfolded, Crowley began to combine the conceptual lexicon of magic with insights gleaned from developments in the study of the mind. It seems likely that Crowley had discovered Freud by the time he wrote "The Soul of the Desert" in 1914, in which he refers, as we have seen, to the unmasking of the "Ego." Although this is not conclusive evidence that he understood "Ego" in the strictly Freudian sense—the term was adopted in translations of Freud but had been in use for almost a century to connote the conscious subject and was common currency among occultists—it is the case that by 1914 Freud's ideas had been circulating in England for several years. At all events, in "The Soul of the Desert," Crowley clearly conceptualizes the Ego as the "I" (Freud's original "das Ich") which speaks in the name of Aleister Crowley and suggests that this "I" is the tip of the iceberg. By the 1920s, Crowley was using key psychoanalytic concepts and acknowledging that Freudian theory offers confirmation of some of the critical insights of magical practice. Psychoanalysis in no way undermined the credibility of magical practice for Crowley or other similarly minded magicians. It merely presents a different narrative of the heroic voyager and the landscape through which he or she travels.⁵⁵ Crowley made it plain that he approved of Freud's theorizing of the relationship between the conscious and unconscious, but he emphasized that Freud had arrived at his conclusions somewhat late in the day. According to Crowley, the father of psychoanalysis was simply articulating what magicians had known for centuries.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ One of the leading exponents of the psychoanalytical perspective was Dr. Francis Israel Regardie (1907–85), who studied with Crowley as a young man. Regardie was expert in both Freudian and Jungian approaches and became a lay analyst. He applied the insights of psychoanalysis to magical practice, but adhered to a belief in the efficacy of magic. See, e.g., Israel Regardie, *The Art and Meaning of Magic* (Toddington, 1964). Regardie's *The Eye in the Triangle* (n. 26 above) offers a Freudian (oedipal) interpretation of Crowley's visions in the desert.

⁵⁶ Crowley's *Confessions* (n. 8 above), written during the early 1920s, are full of references to psychoanalysis, but, in typical fashion, Crowley thought that he understood "the Freudian position" better than Freud (p. 72). Freud, who was a corresponding member of the Society for Psychical Research, was interested in the occult and once remarked in a letter to Hereward Carrington that had he been able to live his life again he would have devoted it to psychical research. See Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* (London, 1957), 3:419–20. The Freud-Ferenczi correspondence makes it clear that both men were thinking about the possible significance of occult phenomena during the early twentieth century, somewhat earlier than was thought to have been the case. See *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sandor Ferenczi*, vol. 1, 1908–14, ed. Eva Brabant, Ernst Falzeder, and Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch, trans. Peter D. Hoffer (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

Erasing the Line in the Sand

It was magical practice rather than psychoanalytic theory which taught Crowley that the apparent coherence of human selfhood is illusory. Although Crowley held to the idea of a hidden essential "Self," a unique core at the heart of the man, magic taught him that the "I" of Aleister Crowley was only one possible self among many. The most terrible lesson that Crowley had to learn, however, and he learned it in the desert, was that it is precisely this "I"—that which apparently secures our place in the worldly order of things—which must undergo dissolution in the ordeal of the Abyss. Crowley understood the Abyss to be a great gulf fixed between "intelligible intuition" and "the intellect." Other commentators see it as "an imaginary gulf" between the real and ideal or "the gulf existing between individual and cosmic consciousness."⁵⁷ As in all magical practice, however, the Abyss can manifest in physical form, the plastic representation of its assumed qualities. But whether understood in symbolic or literal terms, crossing the Abyss involves the final and irrevocable abandonment of the "I" along with its accompanying claim to sole rational authority.

The preamble to confronting the Abyss, and its demonic guardian, Choronzon, is a mental crisis, a "terrible pinnacle of the mind"; to cross the Abyss, "one must abandon utterly and for ever all that one has and is." As Crowley recognized, this is represented in the language of mysticism "as the complete surrender of the self to God"—mystical death as the prerequisite for mystical union; in secular terms, it is "the silencing of the human intellect."⁵⁸ Crowley, schooled in the magical tradition, conceptualized both Choronzon and the Abyss as having an external reality, and he made no subsequent attempt to amend this view. But in psychoanalytic terms, terms which Crowley was later to embrace, it can be said that Choronzon is equally a manifestation of the dark, repressed components of the psyche. In this reading, Choronzon's great resistant cry, "I am I," is simultaneously the magician's last cry of horror and terror as he plunges headlong into the Abyss and the emergent voice of the unknown and unpatrolled unconscious. Characterized by disintegration, dispersion and chaos, qualities suggestive of the fracturing experience of modernity, the Abyss is both symbolic and real. It is emblematic of breakdown—the breakdown of the personal sense of self as manifested by the ego, the uncoupling of the body from the "I," and the dissolution of everyday consciousness. It marks the formal erasure of the

⁵⁷ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 590; Regardie, *Eye in the Triangle*, p. 329; Symonds and Grant, eds., n. 1 to chap. 57, in Crowley's *Confessions*, p. 929.

⁵⁸ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 515, 510.

boundary between the conscious and unconscious, an erasure which the future Magus must invoke at will. Successful negotiation of the Abyss represents the ultimate test of high adeptship. The Magus is one who can establish a harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve "Change in conformity with the Will."⁵⁹

The magician who makes a successful crossing of the Abyss is an initiate whose control is so complete that he can embrace personal disintegration, abandoning all knowledge or awareness of the "I," while retaining and asserting the power and authority of the magical self and Will. The adept who emerges from the experience unscathed has confronted and contained the unleashed furies of the unconscious, not via the patrolling maneuvers of the myopic ego, but by dint of a second operation—the exercise of an infinitely clear-sighted and all-powerful magical personality unconnected with the personal self. In this telling, the Magus is a magical adept who has glimpsed the full implications of his subjectivity. Gone forever is the limiting and limited understanding of the "I" as the finite center of his universe. He has entered the unconscious and acknowledges the permeability of its boundaries. In Crowley's case, he had experienced for himself Choronzon's ability to erase the line in the sand.

The narrative which Crowley presents of the events in the desert is written in the direct language of realism. He does not make a psychoanalytic interpretation of his experience. Crowley deals with the episode as a magical undertaking and represents it as clear evidence that he has achieved enlightened consciousness. He felt that he had first experienced something akin to exalted awareness after the sacrifice at Da'leh Addin: "I knew who I was . . . [but] I did not exist." Crowley understood, in other words, that the "I" is simply a convenient fiction for negotiating one aspect of reality. After his confrontation with Choronzon, Crowley assumed that he had achieved the insights of the true Magus, the Master of the Temple: "I understood that sorrow had no substance; that only my ignorance and lack of intelligence had made me imagine the existence of evil. As soon as I had destroyed my personality, as soon as I had expelled my ego, the universe which to it was indeed a frightful and fatal force, fraught with every form of fear was so only in relation to this idea 'I'; so long as 'I am I,' all else must seem hostile."⁶⁰ As one who had "expelled" his ego and could never again experience anything in the universe as "a frightful and fatal force," Crowley now welcomed each and every new experience with a catholic embrace which refused

⁵⁹ [Aleister Crowley], *Magick in Theory and Practice* (n.p., 1929), p. xvi.

⁶⁰ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 624.

discrimination. The reckless irresponsibility and amorality of his later behavior is legendary. Crowley increasingly incorporated what he called "repulsive rituals" into his magical practice, and by the 1920s had secured his reputation as "the king of depravity" and "the wickedest man in the world"—a reputation which included (probably quite wrongly) a propensity for ritual murder.⁶¹

Unsympathetic observers take 1909 to be the point at which Crowley finally achieved his true potential and went mad. In magical terms it would be understood as failing to subdue the demon Choronzon and succumbing to his curse. Certainly, Crowley acknowledged that in the aftermath of his 1909 experiences he felt utterly lost and alone; in material terms, too, "it has become constantly more difficult to keep afloat."⁶² Increasingly, Crowley seems to have lost a clear sense of the distinction between the enlightened magical self, which can access the unconscious at will and acknowledges no limits, and the man Aleister Crowley, who must still function in the world. Functioning in the world requires a stable sense of personal identity, a well-defined ego, even if that ego is understood to be only part of an infinitely complex story. The magus can move with ease between an initiate and "uninitiate" consciousness, but Crowley's encounter with Choronzon precipitated the blurring of that critical line between the magical self and the temporal "I." Crowley's subsequent behavior suggests, indeed, that he had not made a successful crossing of the Abyss—that he was caught in the grip of unconscious forces that he was unable to filter, monitor, or control. Far from establishing an all-seeing, harmonious relationship with the unconscious, working with it to achieve magical ends, the unconscious now controlled and dominated him.⁶³

As a self-professed Master of the Temple, Crowley went on to devise a technique for the systematic destruction of the ego—regarding it as a barrier to magical progress. During the 1920s, followers at his infamous

⁶¹ John Bull (March 10, 24, 1923), cited by Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: The Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley* (London, 1988), pp. 84–85. Sensationalized accounts of Crowley's Abbey of Thelema in Sicily were appearing in the popular press during this period. The Abbey of Thelema, established in 1920, operated until 1923 when Crowley was expelled from Italy by Mussolini. Its byword, painted above the door, was the Rabelaisian "Do What Thou Wilt." This was taken from Crowley's *Book of the Law* (n. 23 above), "There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt."

⁶² Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 921; see also pp. 628, 661. Crowley had burned through his considerable fortune by his mid-thirties and thereafter was forced to rely on his wits and the support of admirers.

⁶³ Symonds (n. 19 above), p. x, states that, if he had to write Crowley's epitaph, it would be "Aleister Crowley, 1875–1947. He delivered the psychotic goods." Symonds, well versed in the ways of magic and encyclopedic on the subject of Crowley, does not accept Crowley's estimate of his own magical attainments.

Abbey of Thelema at Cefalu, Sicily, were punished severely if they used the word "I."⁶⁴ Crowley's insight was sound, but the technique was flawed. He was seeking to undermine the structural operation by which all meaning, including the sense of a unique, individuated, and gendered self, is produced. There can be no "I" without a clear understanding of that which is not "I"; and, as Crowley put it, "so long as 'I am I', all else must seem hostile." He was pursuing what we might think of as the erasure of difference, and such erasure is a traditional goal of occultism. Conceived as moving beyond the conceptual grip of oppositional dualities—I/thou, self/other, male/female—Crowley was attempting to find a shortcut to one of the highest goals of occultism; a return to a lost Eden of wholeness and completion.

The notion of human beings as originally whole and androgynous is a persistent motif of occult and magical traditions. Hermetic teachings refer to a race of such beings who, like the biblical Adam and Eve, existed in the world prior to a tragic Fall. Modern magical practice recognized the occult significance of masculine/feminine complementarity, and the quest for psychic androgyny is one reading of the alchemist's project which advanced members of the Golden Dawn would have understood. Crowley was certainly aware that androgyny had an occult pedigree, and it came to have a particular magical significance for him. In 1904 Crowley had received, at the dictates of an incarnate being whom he referred to as his Holy Guardian Angel, a series of teachings which culminated in what he called *Liber Legis*—the *Book of the Law*. According to these communications, the world stood on the threshold of a new age—the New Aeon of Horus—the ruling characteristic of which is the unification of the male and female as represented in the androgynous figure of Horus. Although Crowley rejected these teachings at the time, they were to become fundamental to his subsequent development as a magician. Moreover, the image of Horus had a broader cultural significance—one with which Crowley had considerable sympathy.

The androgynous figure, so important in occult teachings, was also an icon of the fin de siècle. The work of Aubrey Beardsley during the 1890s captured the period's fascination with, and fear of, gender ambiguity. His unsettling illustrations for *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* quickly became the symbols of a perverse sensibility that characterized "the decadence."⁶⁵ As discussion of the "woman question" was super-

⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 287–88.

⁶⁵ The classic exposition of "the decadence" is Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1913; reprint, New York, 1966). For Jackson, *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, both new

seded by talk of the "new woman," and the nation was treated to the spectacle of Oscar Wilde's trial, the 1890s ushered in a range of social and sexual identities which many found deeply disturbing. The "manly woman" and apparently feminized man seemed to critics to be representative of a modern sexual economy marked by the descent into anarchy, androgynous creatures who were symptomatic of a brave new world characterized by perversity and decline.⁶⁶ These were fears that an emerging literature which opened up discussion of sexual typologies did nothing to allay. For Crowley, however, the decadent "yellow nineties," typified by the figures of Beardsley and Wilde, were the liberating years of his youth. At twenty-three he had fallen in love with another Cambridge man, Jerome Pollitt, a close friend of Aubrey Beardsley and a talented female impersonator, and in key respects Crowley remained wedded throughout his life to the outlook and *modus operandi* of the decadent movement.⁶⁷ A poseur extraordinaire in the style of Wilde, and a man who set out to replicate in life the dark, wicked, luxurious world of the fictional Dorian Gray, Crowley consistently experimented with the inversion of dominant categories. This was as much the case with his magic as with his own sexuality and gender identity; in each case, and in different but related ways, he played on the "yellow" theme of perverse delinquency. When the New Aeon of Horus beckoned in 1904, Crowley cannot have been altogether unresponsive. For the *Book of the Law* can be read as a hymn to decadence, while androgyny—possibly the ultimate heterodox masculinity—was an attribute that Crowley wished to claim for himself.

Writing in the 1920s, Crowley maintained that he had long held the conviction that he was in certain respects both male and female. Speaking of himself in the third person, a distancing technique reminiscent of Dr. Jekyll's disclaimer,⁶⁸ Crowley notes that, while "his masculinity is above

periodicals of the mid-1890s, encapsulated the spirit of fin-de-siècle decadence. Beardsley was art editor for *The Yellow Book* before moving on to *The Savoy*.

⁶⁶ See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York, 1990).

⁶⁷ Pollitt, whom Crowley met at Cambridge, performed as Diane de Rougy after the actress, Liane de Pougy. It is noteworthy that Crowley, mindful of the Wilde trial, was keen to defend Pollitt against accusations of "a tendency to androgyny." See Crowley, *Confessions* (n. 8 above), p. 144. Crowley later immortalized Pollitt in his tribute to homosexual love (also a tribute of sorts to Richard Burton's *Perfumed Garden*), *The Scented Garden of Abdullah the Satirist of Shiraz* (n. 28 above).

⁶⁸ See the earlier reference to Dr. Jekyll's inability to speak of Hyde as "I." In his *Confessions*, Crowley consistently refers to himself during his childhood years as "he," stating that it feels as though he is writing about "the behaviour of somebody else" (p. 53). Lengthy discussion of narrative voice is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is worth noting that in the *Confessions* there is slippage between a child and adult "he."

the normal," he possesses female characteristics like slight, graceful limbs and well-developed breasts:

There is thus a sort of hermaphroditism in his physical structure; and this is naturally expressed in his mind. But whereas, in most similar cases, the feminine qualities appear at the expense of manhood, in him they are added to a perfectly normal masculine type. The principal effect has been to enable him to understand the psychology of women, to look at any theory with comprehensive and impartial eyes, and to endow him with maternal instincts on spiritual planes. . . . He has been able to philosophize about nature from the standpoint of a complete human being; certain phenomena will always be unintelligible to men as such, others, to women as such. He, by being both at once, has been able to formulate a view of existence which combines the positive and the negative, the active and the passive, in a single identical equation. . . . Again and again . . . we shall find his actions determined by this dual structure.⁶⁹

While Crowley is here articulating the gendered categories of masculinity and femininity in essentialist terms, also an aspect of traditional occult philosophy, he conceives of himself as embodying a beneficial "dual structure": he is "both at once." Physical "hermaphroditism" is therefore replicated in terms of gender and represented as giving him the privileged insight of "a complete human being." Crowley maintained that his "dual structure" enabled him to act in the world and "philosophize" about it with an unusual degree of acuity and success. Furthermore, this "dual structure" extended to Crowley's sexual identity. He was flagrantly bisexual. There was no shortage of women in Crowley's life, and the Crowley mythology paints him as a tender and inventive lover. He was, in fact, prey to powerful and contradictory attitudes toward women, but these remained largely unacknowledged. Crowley believed that he was irresistible and that his success as a heterosexual lover was due to his unique ability to express an (again essentialized) "savage male passion to create" modified by a "feminine" gentleness.⁷⁰ Bisexuality is not the same as "hermaphroditism" or androgyny, but in Crowley's mind his sexuality was yet another expression of the wholeness implied by his "being both at once."

Equally, much could be made of the fact that Crowley dates his conception of himself as "I" from the moment of his father's death in 1887.

⁶⁹ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 45.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Crowley had earlier been deeply in love with his wife, Rose, who was in the process of divorcing him during his 1909 trip to Algiers with Neuburg. The divorce was the major reason for Crowley's decision to leave England at that time. Women were always important in his magical life, and there was a succession of magical consorts, chief among them Leah Hirsig—the "Scarlet Woman" at the Abbey of Thelema.

There is every indication that Neuburg shared this view, and that he applied it to himself. In a long poem in the *Triumph of Pan*, a collection published in 1910 which incorporates a complex amalgam of personal and magical references, Neuburg writes: "O thou hast sucked my soul, lord of my nights and days, / My body, pure and whole, is merged within the ways / That lead to thee, my queen, who gav'st life to me / When all my heart was green."⁷¹ These lines, addressed to Pan, contain that element of Crowley's relationship to Neuburg—he is both "lord" and "queen"—which must form at least a subtext for the poem if not the collection. Similarly, there can be little doubt about Neuburg's meaning in the title poem: "there is a Great One, cold and burning, / Crafty and hot in lust, / Who would make me a Sapphist and an Urning, / A Lesbian of the dust."⁷² Whether or not the "Great One" is Crowley, it is clear that Neuburg experienced his spirituality as a sexualized (or bisexualized) "Sapphist" and "Urning." The use of the term "Urning" gives a specific clue to Neuburg's thinking. The term, familiar from Plato's *Symposium*, had been adopted by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs half a century earlier in his discussion of homosexuality and reappeared in a book which greatly influenced Neuburg, Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* (London, 1908). A great admirer of Carpenter, who had himself been influenced by Eastern religion and philosophy, and perhaps particularly taken with the suggestion that homosexuality might represent a new evolutionary form, Neuburg apparently absorbed the discussion of what Carpenter called the "doubleness of nature"—the feminine soul trapped within the male body, and vice versa. In *The Triumph of Pan*, however, Neuburg reworks it, combining contemporary discussions of homosexuality with the enduring motif of the hermaphrodite. When he

⁷¹ Victor B. Neuburg, "The Romance of Olivia Vane," in *The Triumph of Pan* (London, 1910; reprint, London, 1989), p. 145. The introduction to the 1989 facsimile edition of *The Triumph of Pan* is written by Neuburg's granddaughter, Caroline Robertson, who argues that Neuburg's work cannot be read as straightforwardly "homosexual" poetry. Neuburg certainly had sexual relationships with women and married in 1921. A son was born in 1924, but the marriage was unhappy, and by the early 1930s Neuburg and his wife were living separate lives. Caroline Robertson is anxious to refute the suggestion by Jean Overton Fuller and others that Neuburg's poems are simply "about" Crowley, and she bases her claim on the significance of male/female polarity within the occult tradition and the fact that Neuburg is often talking about spiritual (rather than physical) possession by the god, Pan. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the poems operate simultaneously at several levels and that both Crowley and the Crowley/Neuburg relationship, magical and mundane, are ever present. It seems impossible, e.g., to misunderstand lines like "Sweet wizard, in whose footsteps I have trod / Unto the shrine of the obscene god" (p. 144) or to misinterpret the desert imagery (p. 12). Victor Neuburg published his first book of poetry, *A Green Garland*, in London in 1908. *The Triumph of Pan* was widely reviewed, and Katherine Mansfield made it the book of the month in *Rhythm*.

⁷² Victor B. Neuburg, "The Triumph of Pan," in *The Triumph of Pan*, p. 6.

positions himself in his poem as both woman-desiring woman and man-desiring man, Neuburg is claiming a radically different "hermaphroditism": two "inversions" "at once."

Crowley, on the other hand, experienced his bisexuality in classic psychoanalytic terms as "the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche."⁷³ This meant that, as a desiring man, Crowley gave vent to what he took to be the ultimate expression of masculinity—the (albeit modified) "savage male passion to create"; as a desiring woman, he sought to become the beautiful object of that "savage male passion." He often used the name Alys (a feminized form of Aleister) to signify his femininity and, as Alys, adopted what he thought of as the feminine sexual role. In his relationship with Neuburg, Crowley assumed the subject position of a desiring woman. In doing so, however, he was caught up in a fantasy which went far beyond the receptive "feminine." As the object of male desire, Crowley was in thrall to a scenario marked by orgiastic violation. This was exemplified in his relationship with Neuburg by the central importance assumed by the god Pan—"All devourer, all begetter"; to know "Panic" is to experience both ecstasy and terror at the hand of the god.⁷⁴ Pan, representative of a pagan Greece that had special significance for Victorian homosexual men, and long associated in the Christian imagination with the devil, was a powerful signifier of the sexualized magic initiated by the two men.⁷⁵ When Crowley and Neuburg speak of Pan, the imagery is redolent with heat and violence; a god, half man, half beast, who rapes and ravishes men and women alike. Crowley, who in his younger years had feared and sought to avoid pain, actively recruited it as a woman. And as a desiring woman, Crowley acted out a fantasy in which he became the recipient of his own unrecognized hostility toward women. If his "dual structure" consistently modified the sadistic impulses of his masculine sexuality, it also facilitated—like the great circle of loose rocks at Da'leh Addin—a kind

⁷³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p. 61. Theoretically, at least, hermaphroditism and androgyny would imply a self-referential desiring subject.

⁷⁴ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 603. See also, "The Lost Shepherd," and references to "Panic" in "The Triumph of Pan," in Neuburg, *The Triumph of Pan*.

⁷⁵ Neuburg (like Norman Mudd, also a follower of Crowley) had been a member of the Pan Society at Cambridge, and the god Pan had cultural importance in the revivalist classical drama and arts of the period. Pan meant much more than this to Crowley and Neuburg, however, and when the two men finally parted in 1914 Crowley apparently ritually cursed Neuburg in a formula said to be linked with the god Pan. Neuburg suffered a nervous collapse and lived thereafter in fear of Crowley's return. Fuller (n. 16 above), p. 239, reports a conversation that took place between Neuburg and a friend in the 1920s during which Neuburg was shaken to be told that he was "awfully goat-like." He replied: "I was one. A goat was my curse" (original emphasis).

of closure. In a dual identification, he became the sacrificial object of his own desires.

The "sacrifice" at Da'leh Addin, during which Crowley experienced "the annihilation of the Self in Pan" and consummation with "that primal and final breath . . . of God," in fact represents a primal scene of considerable significance. It is one in which an erotic investment in pain and desecration, an investment which increasingly figured in the "repulsive rituals" of his magical practice, was played out in vivid tandem with fantasies of bestiality and male rape. The strong masochistic element which ran through his various sexual identifications, and which Crowley recognized as a constituent element of both his masculinity and femininity, reached its apotheosis in the sacrificial moment.⁷⁶ But the "sacrifice" equally marks that elision of identifications, magical and mundane, on which the Crowley/Neuburg relationship endlessly turned. For just as Crowley could insist that Neuburg, in one incarnation the savage god, was equally a "masochist" and a "pederast," so, too, Neuburg experienced Crowley, his seemingly feminized lover, as a "homosexual sadist." It is likely that Crowley's expressive femininity had little to do with the apparent powerlessness it celebrated. A sexual scene dominated by the elaboration of a rape fantasy was probably directed and controlled, like everything else in their relationship, by Crowley himself. Crowley glosses the ritual on the mountain with the simple comment: "there I sacrificed myself." Both active and passive, avowal and disavowal, he who sacrifices and he who is sacrificed, Crowley acknowledges the ambiguity of the covenant. And in a final significant move of disavowal and displacement, he closes the account with "There was an animal in the wilderness, but it was not I."⁷⁷

Crowley's is a Manichean vision in which the principles of light and darkness do eternal battle, and in which supreme magical attainments are inextricably bound up with a "savage" bestiality. He is the enlightened Magus and the "animal in the wilderness"; "both at once . . . in a single identical equation." After crossing the Abyss in 1909, Crowley finally accepted the *Book of the Law*, and with it his destiny as the prophet of Horus. As such, Crowley took the title of The Beast 666, the

⁷⁶ Crowley recognized that masochism played an important part in his relationships with women, but he sought to deflect it through gestures of misogynistic contempt: "Masochism, too, is normal to man; for the sex-act is the Descent into Hell of the Saviour." See *Magical Record of the Beast 666: The Diaries of Aleister Crowley, 1914–1920*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London, 1972), p. 257, in Crowley's diary of 1919–20. Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity," *Camera Obscura* 17 (May 1988): 30–67, notes that masochism, traditionally characterized in psychoanalytic theory as "feminine," is equally a constituent of male and female subjectivity (p. 36).

⁷⁷ Crowley, *Confessions* (n. 8 above), p. 621.

Beast of Revelations with whom he had identified since childhood. His acceptance of this designation, celebrated in Neuburg's *Triumph of Pan*, and which in occult circles is synonymous with Crowley's name, marked a new phase in his magical Work.⁷⁸ Pain, blood, and excrement became the trademarks of Crowley's "repulsive rituals," and his followers were obliged to wear on their bodies "the Mark of the Beast."⁷⁹ As lurid tales of his exploits at the Abbey of Thelema began to emerge in the 1920s, the popular press denounced Crowley as a devil-worshipping "human beast."⁸⁰ In an ironic reversal of his own earlier conception of his "two personalities," Crowley came to personify in the public imagination a kind of slaving, animalistic Mr. Hyde. He was transformed into the monstrous creature of Crowley legend, a black magician of mythic status whose demonic persona was reminiscent of Stead's Jack the Ripper—the sadistic murderer with an eroticized and "uncontrollable taste for blood."⁸¹ Crowley had become the modern representative of a fin-de-siècle "cult of the beast": the monster howling at the dark side of the moon.⁸²

Conclusion

In this essay, I have presented one aspect of my broader discussion of the multidimensional relationship between fin-de-siècle ritual magic and key contemporary concerns. The analysis of Crowley's magical Work in the desert is part of the argument I make for magical practice as an important if unorthodox articulation of what we have come to understand as a modern sense of self. Certainly, one reading of Crowley's North African experience is that advanced ritual magic invited a radical "modernist" decentering of the subject, even as it pursued the occult goal of repairing a split and divided self.⁸³ Crowley's experiment equally indicates, however, that magical practice, with its supposedly timeless procedures and "truths," was both an intensely personal and culturally

⁷⁸ See Neuburg, "The Triumph of Pan," in *The Triumph of Pan*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ The Mark of the Beast is a circle containing the seven-pointed star of Babalon. It symbolizes the cojoining of Babalon and the Beast. See Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 789.

⁸⁰ See "A Human Beast Returns," *John Bull* (August 30, 1924), cited in Suster (n. 61 above), p. 85.

⁸¹ "Occasional Notes," *Pall Mall Gazette* (September 10, 1888), cited in Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (n. 49 above), p. 207.

⁸² Nina Auerbach, *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 76–77, identifies a late Victorian "obsession" with "hybrids"—fairies, wolfmen, vampires, and so on—which becomes "something like the cult of the beast." Interestingly, she notes that the "noble Victorian enterprise of mighty self-making always threatens to produce, not superior mutations, but monsters."

⁸³ I am indebted to Jann Matlock for this insight.

specific enterprise. Crowley might have been Perdurabo, a master magician who explored the conceptual universe of a sixteenth-century Magus, but he clearly brought *himself* to that endeavor. Perdurabo was the magical personality of an early twentieth-century middle-class man with very specific proclivities whose reworking of past magical practice was in constant dialogue with the concerns of the present. In magical terms, Crowley's Work was fatally flawed precisely because he was finally unable to distinguish between the magical self and the temporal "I." Nevertheless, whatever we might make of the magical episteme, it would be difficult to deny that the "two personalities" are in some way constitutive of the particular historical actor. The Magus was the man.

I have sought to argue here that Crowley's magical Work, flawed or otherwise, represented a self-conscious engagement with the self in all of its complexity, recognized and unrecognizable, known and unknown. And as such, it has important implications for those of us who are concerned with historicizing the theoretical concept of subjectivity. The episode in the desert suggests that the magical self—created through the erasure of psychic boundaries and the unraveling of the processes through which the "I" is constituted—might represent the expression of a *fully realized*, historically contingent subjectivity. It is certainly clear that Crowley's magical exploration of the Aethyrs undertaken in the name of Perdurabo was simultaneously a direct interrogation of the undisclosed phenomena of the personal self. The displaced "I" of the Magus was nevertheless expressive of an historicized self, and Crowley's experiences in the desert involved the display of unconscious elements as specific and theatrical as anything created by Robert Louis Stevenson. His magical Work was intrinsically bound up with the enactment of fears, hostilities, and desires which circulated around the expression of a rogue bourgeois masculinity. Certainly, the subtext of Crowley's account of events in the desert is a narrative of self which exceeds the exoteric revelations of his *Confessions*. Whatever the merits and demerits of Crowley's magical Work, his struggles in the desert—symbolized by the "sacrifice" at Da'leh Addin, the encounter with Choronzon, and that final despairing cry, "I am I"—signified an extraordinary attempt on the part of this Edwardian bourgeois to understand the full implications of his own subjectivity. This also suggests that the "Magical Tradition" and its teachings might indeed be characterized, as Crowley maintained, as the "table from which Freud . . . ate of a few crumbs that fell."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Crowley, *Confessions*, p. 45.